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to correct those few errors which are interspersed through the wide field of their inquiries, these are the duties of every votary of science, even of the most humble grade, and will serve as the best testimony of admiration and respect to the great masters. May the present effort be taken as such an expression, and as one of the many proofs that, dying, Humboldt and Ritter have bequeathed to humanity a living record of their great genius.

St. Petersburg, 1st October, 1859.

XVIII.—*On the Island of Mahi, Seychelles.* By Lieut.-Colonel
LEWIS PELLY.

THERE are, in all, thirty islands in this group, varying in size from that of Mahi, which is about 17 miles long, by from 3 to 4 miles broad, down to that of islets containing only a few acres of ground.

The group may be divided into two clusters; one to the westward, round Mahi, and the other to the eastward, round the Island of Praslin, which is next in size to Mahi. The general aspect of both clusters is green and cheerful; but that of Mahi is the loftiest, for the peaks along the backbone of Mahi itself may be nearly 2000 feet above the water-line, while Silhouette, a woody, conical isle, lying about 17 miles to the northward of Mahi, rises into one central peak of from 2000 to 3000 feet in height.

The Seychelle Islands (which derive their name from a former French Minister) are a granite formation, cropping up in the centre of a vast bowl of coral. This bowl may have a diameter of some 120 miles: its rim rising nearest to the surface of the water, like one of the Atolls described by Mr. Darwin. Approaching the rim of this coral bowl from any point oceanwards, you strike soundings in from 7 to 8 or 9 fathoms. Here and there, especially on the western quadrant, you come upon 3-fathom patches. And on the northern, as also, I believe, on the southern edge, you find low sandy islands, sprinkled with scrubby brushwood, and differing altogether in appearance, as perhaps in structure also, from the Seychelle group proper. Bird Island and St. Abbs are isolated, uninhabited spots of the description under notice.

Running towards the centre of the bowl, the soundings deepen to 12, to 20, and to 32 fathoms; and give the last-named depth nearly up to North Island, which appears like a detached promontory of Silhouette. It seems, indeed, that the Seychelle Islands are the loftiest summits along the axis of a primitive system of submerged mountains, whose lower scarps and intervening slopes and plateaux support the coral growth now sketched.

A steepish woody ridge of hill-land runs the length of the Island of Mahi, now broken into transverse valleys, and now bright with a plot of greensward—here exposing a granite cliff, and there discovering a torrent-scarred ravine of red earth with overhanging brows of trees. Rain falls frequently, and almost every species of tropical plant seems to flourish: I observed, among other vegetation, the guava, the Seville orange, the leechee, the breadfruit, the manioc, the sweet potato, wild ginger and arrowroot, the caju-nut, cinnamon, cloves, palms of many varieties—for example the sago, the areca, the coco-nut, and the coco-de-mer; coffee, vanilla, the tamarind, the mango, rice, pawn sooparee, sugar, cotton, nutmeg, mace, the poppoi, also the casuarina, the sirus, the wood known on the island as the nut-wood, and which is useful for a broad, long, and durable planking, the fan-palm or traveller's friend, and the neem tree. I do not know how many among these species may be indigenous; but I am told that some at least of them have been introduced.

The mangoes did not look healthy; cotton and rice, I learned, had been extensively planted during the French occupation of the island, and thrive excellently; coffee also is said to yield a good berry. Sugar—of which I visited an abandoned estate of some 600 acres on the north-west side of the island—does not seem to pay; but whether want of success were attributable to an unsuitable soil and climate, or to want of skill and industry, I could not accurately ascertain. The groves of cinnamon were dense, large, and luxuriant; but this spice does not pay as an export.

The climate of Mahi is reputed singularly salubrious for an island situate only five degrees from the equator. Fever is almost unknown, and the commonest disease is dysentery. Wood of an excellent and durable quality was formerly abundant on the slopes of the hills; but the supply was recklessly wasted, and is now nearly exhausted. The best wood for building purposes is now brought from Silhouette. Sheep will not thrive at Mahi. But goats, it is said, do well enough, although I saw very few on the farms. No cattle are bred on the island; nor is beef killed, unless when a cruiser may chance to call in. Both sheep and cattle are imported in small numbers from Madagascar. A few ponies also are imported; and I noticed one young camel, looking very raw, wet, and unhappy. Roads, in a general way, there are none; though one leads from Port Victoria straight up across the backbone of the island, but shrinks into a footpath as it descends the western watershed.

I saw but one specimen of the coco-de-mer, Praslin being the only island where this palm, unique it is said in the Seychelles, is indigenous or thrives spontaneously. It is called the loftiest and longest-lived of the palm tribe. When first it appears above

ground it throws out one large leaf, and for some years following throws out annually one leaf more. Then it begins to protrude its endogenous trunk; and when the trunk is well up, the age of the tree may, it is supposed, be known from the number of rings on its rind, added to the number of leaves on its coronal. The wood, branches, and fruit are very serviceable. The creole girls peel the leaves into thinnest strips, and work these into delicate and beautiful baskets and fans. The shell of the fruit you may find, anon, turned into the schallop of some Fukeer in Northern India.

The census, which distinguishes only between the sexes, gives the population of the whole group of the Seychelles at from 6000 to 7000 human beings. Of these, Mahi may number 2000, and Praslin 500 inhabitants. But this estimate is approximate merely. The population of Mahi is principally creoles; these are reputed indolent and good-natured, addicted to drink, especially rum; of easy morals, and long-lived. Their staple of food is manioc and fish, of which latter article there is abundance, though carelessly sought. They consume also poultry and rice, and occasionally turtle, which are brought from the Amirante Isles, and preserved in salt-water ponds, drained and flooded by the ebb and flow of the tide.

Port Victoria is the chief town of Mahi: a neat township, picturesquely dotted among underwood immediately above the line of sea beach and along the lowest swellings of a background of hills. It possesses a creditable stone-masonry church, and the Government House peeps out prettily from its English-looking grounds and shrubberies. A clear boulder-strewn stream rushes down between the Commissioner's lawn and the main street of the town. The houses in general are built of wood upon coral foundations, and have the high roofs, gables, and general character of the little chateaux and farmsteads of Normandie. Creole French is the language of common life, with manners and customs to match. Here, as everywhere else in the East, orientals adopt French modes more readily than they do those of any other European nation; and you may find a crisp-woolled minx of an African, with thick lips, gesticulating about her civil rights, and adjusting her kerchief, her boddice, and her gaudy skirt, just as though she were a pert little grisette.

Considered as a port, Victoria offers sheltered anchorage during the south-east trade and south-west monsoon; but is open to the force of that from the north-east. Mahi itself protects the harbour to the westward, and a chain of islets to the eastward. The southernmost link of this chain is separated only by a narrow and reef-strewn channel from the main island. However, few square-rigged vessels visit Mahi: occasionally one of the cruisers from

the division of the east coast of Africa calls in ; and Port Victoria is considered, I believe, as one of the best stations in that division for giving leave to the men. American whalers sometimes put in for water or provisions ; but, on the whole, the trade of the island is trifling, and is principally carried on in small schooners running between Mauritius, the Amirante, and Seychelles. These bring supplies and miscellaneous goods from Mauritius, and turtle, which are speared, from the Amirante. They carry back coco-nut. Estates of this nut yield good returns at Seychelles, and I was informed that the proprietor of the larger portion of Silhouette lives at Mauritius in affluence upon an income drawn from coco estates on the islet. When at Zanzibar, Captain Oldfield and I gave some encouragement to an Indian merchant to run a small cargo of rice, coffee, and other provisions to Mahi. The profit on the venture was considerable, although the goods were sold out of hand. And I have no doubt that, on a small scale, a remunerative trade might be driven between Seychelles and the east coast of Africa. The goods from Zanzibar were shipped in a dhow, which ran across in the month of May ; and this was, I believe, the first native craft that had ever made the passage.

Politically considered, Seychelles, like the Amirante Isles, are a dependency of the Mauritius Government. The subordinate administration of Seychelles is in the hands of a Civil Commissioner, on an income of about 1000*l.* per annum. The chief judicial functionary is a District Magistrate, who becomes administrator *ad interim* in the absence of a Commissioner. There is also a Medical Officer and an Inspector of Police, with a detachment of some 22 constables. The cost of the Seychelle administration I understand to be about 6000*l.* per annum, against a revenue of from 1300*l.* to 1500*l.* per annum, collected on the islands, and derived mainly from an excise on rum, together with a customs receipt of about 100*l.*, being an import duty at 6 per cent. *ad valorem*, gathered on the spot. It is asserted, however, that the bulk of the Seychelle revenue should be customs, but that these are principally collected at Mauritius, and appear in the Mauritius returns ; since nearly all imports, whether of provisions, miscellaneous goods, and even coolies from India, are passed through the Custom House at Port Louis before being transmitted to Seychelles.

The jurisdiction of the District Magistrate extends to all criminal cases, wheresoever committed on the Seychelle Islands. He can imprison for any term ; but in cases of murder he simply institutes preliminary proceedings, and the trial is held in Mauritius, whither witnesses and accused are shipped as opportunity may offer. Complainants, defendants, and parties criminally

charged, on whatsoever island, come to Mahi as the court of first instance. The Judge does not go on circuit. Appeal lies to the higher court at Port Louis in cases of imprisonment for more than one year, or of fine above 50*l.* Hard labour on the roads obtains, and is found to work well. The average number of prisoners in jail at one time may be about 50.* All civil cases are open to appeal to Mauritius. Landed titles, like other matters on the plea side, are subject to French law—the old Code Napoléon, I believe. About 12 judicial transferences of land have been registered in 5 years; the estates transferred varying in value from 1000 dollars up to a maximum of 5000 dollars. No land-tax is levied; all land being held in fee simple. All correspondence passes through the Commissioner, and is liable to his remarks, as head of the local Government.

The old French mark passes as the common small currency of the island. Its value may be about three farthings. The rupee and the dollar, especially the Maria Theresa or black dollar (still struck at Vienna from a die preserved for use on the east coast of Africa, I believe) are also current.

The inhabitants of Mahi assert that they suffer from being a dependency of Mauritius. They would prefer that Seychelles should be a separate government, so that their Commissioner might enjoy more real power, especially in financial matters, and for the prosecution of works of public utility. They consider, further, that the desired change would preclude references and consequent delays; that justice would be brought to their doors; and that there would be a greater incentive to development of the resources of the islands on the part of the local Government. They would like also some degree of Municipal Government to be initiated in the more considerable islands, such as Praslin, so as to save the necessity for reference in minor matters to Mahi. They would wish their coolies to be imported direct from India, instead of through Mauritius. Indeed, they complain much of the want of labour, although Captain Oldfield brought them a supply of nearly 400 emancipated slaves from the east coast of Africa. These are now carefully registered, protected, and provided for. I talked with one man, a runaway slave of His Highness Syed Burghesh. The fellow told me his wages were 6 dollars a month, that he was saving money, and that he intended to return to Africa directly he had made a bag.

Defective titles to some of the estates is another alleged ground of complaint. It appears that, in the first instance, French immigrants settling on these islands received grants of lands in allot-

* I am not sure but that some of these fifty may have come from Mauritius.

ments of 108 acres each, upon condition of residence and building within a period of one year. These grants were made provisionally at Seychelles, and were afterwards confirmed in perpetuity by the Superior Government at Mauritius. When, however, the English took Seychelles, and which they did some little time before taking Mauritius, they continued to grant provisionally as before ; but of course no confirmation took place from the Isle of France so long as the latter remained French. Hence the titles of estates granted during that period were unconfirmed at the time, and still so remain. This defect, the creoles say, should in equity be remedied.

Thus much for the little plaints of the good people of Mahi. Others assert that all their difficulties and their poverty are due to their own want of thrift, industry, and enterprise. One fact is obvious—that Nature has given them a delightful island, abundantly watered, well stored with wood, rich in soil, capable of producing the fruits of many climates, and healthful. Where these blessings are freely bestowed, it is difficult to believe that man cannot render life useful, prosperous, and happy, provided only he himself be virtuous, prudent and persevering.

The mail-steamer to and from Aden and Mauritius calls at Mahi ; except during the months of June, July, and August, when, owing to the force of the south-west monsoon, it avoids the islands on its passage out. It so chanced that, during the week I passed in Port Victoria, waiting on board Her Majesty's steam-frigate *Orestes* for the mail, the Seychelles were visited by a violent hurricane, the first ever experienced there. This circular storm, strengthening out of the south-east trade, veered southward, westward, and gave us its full fury from north-west. It then moderated northwards, hung a while at north-east, and finally subsided into the south-east trade again, followed by floods of rain. I do not remember to have ever heard any sound so mournful as the Titanic sobbings of that hurricane—now hushed an instant, as, spent with passion, the tempest gasped for breath.

During the storm there were reefs all round us within a few hundred yards, and the shore was not a mile distant ; yet we could see neither land nor reef, nor even sea, but only a scud of foam blown past the side like lace rapidly unrolled. On the storm subsiding, the scene ashore was melancholy indeed. The steeper hill-slopes had been washed bodily down into the valleys : in some instances crushing, during the night, estates, families, and houses in one common grave and ruin. The brook by Government House had burst its banks, and poured in a torrent down the main street of the town, hurrying houses, provisions, men, women, and children along its flood towards the sea. Trees were torn up by the roots ; the palm tops were twisted off at the neck, as during the cannon-

ade at Mohamera ; and the French Religieuses were crushed into the earth as they stood with their priest and their scholars at morning prayer in their hospital. I left one day afterwards ; but even then some fifty people were asserted to have been killed or severely maimed, and it was assumed that some fifty more were missing on the one island of Mahi. The little schooners were crunched together and sunk.

XIX.—*Explorations in North-Western Australia.*

By JAMES MARTIN, Esq., M.B.

Communicated by the Governor of Western Australia, through the COLONIAL OFFICE.

I. Mr. MARTIN's *Journal of the First Voyage, 1863.**

FROM DOUBTFUL BAY TO THE LOWER RAPIDS OF THE GLENELG RIVER.

June 22, 1863.—Doubtful Bay is a magnificent sheet of water, 9 miles in length from north to south, and six miles in breadth from east to west. Although in the summer vast quantities of water may from all sides pour into the bay, and the tides gain additional force thereby, yet, as it is thoroughly protected from every wind and from a heavy sea by a range of islands and reefs to seaward, and the natural break-water of the Montgomery Islands and the coral reef, 14 miles still further to the westward, as the holding ground is of the very best, and as there is abundance of room in which to work the largest ship, Doubtful Bay, if ever this part of the Australian coast should be colonised, will prove a harbour of refuge second to none. From the great rise and fall of the tide also, 36 feet, this bay would be a good site for works necessary to the repairing of ships. A better terminus to the system of Australian telegraphs, when connected with those of Europe and Asia, I think it will be difficult to find. There does not seem to be any agricultural or even pastoral land in the immediate vicinity of the bay, and the hills both of the islands and the main are of the most precipitous character. The south-east shore is fringed with an immense mangrove swamp, intersected by numerous deep creeks. It has all the appearance of being the mouth of a large river.

* This part of the memoir is a portion of the narrative of an expedition sent out, with live stock, from Western Australia, in search of new pastoral land in the vicinity of Glenelg River (Lat. 15° 40' S.). The exploring party consisted of three gentlemen (besides Mr. Martin), and sailed from Champion Bay (20° 45' S. lat.) in the schooner *Flying Foam*, on the 6th of June, 1863.